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ABSTRACT

Some guidelines can make fundraising by Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapters easier and more productive. The first question to be asked is what the FFA chapter wants to accomplish and how much it will cost. Once the goal is set, an appropriate project can be adopted. Criteria for selecting projects include the following: (1) Does the project have educational value? (2) Does the project offer a reasonable return for the effort expended? (3) Does the project avoid competition with other clubs and organizations in the school and in the community? (4) Does the project have a benefit for those from whom the money will be raised? and (5) Does the project conform to school and community policies and laws as well as contribute to a positive club image? Examples of less appropriate projects include selling candy bars or school mugs; more appropriate projects include providing services to the local fairgrounds, selling firewood or plants, and providing labor for local farmers or agribusinesses. Once an appropriate project is selected, scheduling and arrangements for getting it on the school calendar, setting a time and place, determining facility requirements, and arranging for transportation must be made. Provisions must be made for personnel organization, financial arrangements, publicity, and follow-up. Recordkeeping is also crucial to the success of the project and the avoidance of the same mistakes later. Effective planning can make fundraising a contributing, integral part of each FFA chapter. (KC)

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FUNDRAISING: Does It Have To Be Painful?

It is 7:15 p.m. and the FFA meeting has been going for about 15 minutes. Cindy, one of your more motivated members, gets up and says, "We've got to do something to raise some money! The Bartel chapter raises $6,000 every year and we try to limp along on a measly $900."

George (the one who always asks the dumb questions) asks, "but what would we do with more money?" Cindy replies, "Let's wait until we figure out how much we can raise before we worry about spending it!" Personally, you wish there was some way to avoid the issue altogether.

Fund raising is always an important topic at FFA meetings and often requires a lot of time from chapter members and advisors. Conversations like the one above can frequently be heard in one form or another "wherever Future Farmers meet." This emphasis on fundraising requires that we evaluate our efforts and make sure they are maximally effective.

How should a chapter determine how much money to raise? What kinds of fundraising projects are appropriate and effective? How much time should be spent on fund raising? What are the steps in planning an effective project? The answer to these questions varies somewhat from chapter to chapter. There are, however, important guidelines that can make our efforts more productive.

Fundraising Guidelines

The first question is the most fundamental. "How much money should we raise?" This question is also secondary. The primary question is, "What does our FFA Chapter want to accomplish and how much will it cost to do those things." Without this information, fundraising becomes a haphazard shot in the dark. Although it almost seems inappropriate, chapters should not spend time and effort raising money when there is no clear need for that money. On the other hand, chapters should not let past fundraising success dictate the scope of the chapter program of activities.

Too often, valuable learning activities are summarily dismissed with the phrase: "Oh, we couldn't ever do that, it costs too much." While cost is definitely a factor and needs to be considered when prioritizing activities, it should never be the initial question. The chapter goals should direct fund raising, not the other way around.

Answering the first question of how much money the chapter needs to properly fund its activities makes the rest of the questions much easier. If the chapter raised $4,000 last year on a project that took 30 percent of the chapter effort, and this year it is determined that only $2,000 is needed to adequately fund the chapter, then the project ought to be cut back to require less effort and allow chapter more time for more productive activities.

On the other hand, if a chapter raised $600 last year through a series of projects taking 30 percent of the chapter effort and it is determined that this year $2,000 is needed, then the chapter should look at some other way to raise money that yields more return for the time spent. Otherwise, the effort of raising the money could very well cancel any benefit the money itself might have.

Appropriate Criteria

Selecting a project is often a confusing process. Ideas from commercial firms, other clubs and previous experience create quite an array from which to choose. There are, however, some valuable criteria that can be applied to make the task easier and decisions more effective. These criteria are:

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(1) Does the project have an educational value? Fund raising is often a major part of the chapter program of activities. Therefore, the time spent on fund raising should be of value to the members. Many moneymaking activities can be valuable learning experiences, especially if the chapter members are made responsible for planning, executing and evaluating. The advisor needs to guard against the idea that fund raising activities are merely necessary evils endured to fatten the chapter coffers, and that they are best directed from the top.

Does the project offer a reasonable return for the effort expended? Many types of activities promise lots of money, but upon closer evaluation, would require the entire chapter membership along with the advisor and spouse to become indentured slaves for 360 out of the next 365 days. The amount of advisor effort should also be evaluated. A major project during county fair time, when an advisor is already heavily committed, may be impractical.

(3) Does the project avoid competition with other clubs and organizations, both in the school and the community? Stealing another club's major moneymaker is not only a good way to compromise the success of your own project, but it is also a good way to spoil the chapter's public image. Even if the project is a success the first year, the negative public relations created can be detrimental to future activities in which the club might want to get involved.

(4) Does the project have a benefit for those from whom the money will be raised? Projects that benefit all those involved are always more successful than those that simply raise money for the chapter. Businesses are inundated with requests to support activities and respond much more positively to those projects from which they can see some real benefit.

Often, the FFA is in a position to raise money from rural people who are not as likely to have been approached by other organizations. FFA chapters need to be especially careful to avoid the "You owe us" syndrome or the "You can always take it off your taxes." Although contributions are often tax deductible (and it is important to keep that in mind when designing fund raisers), it usually costs contributors much more than they gain in tax deductions.

Businesses and individuals also have many competing priorities about which FFA chapters need to be sensitive. Remember that people do not owe your chapter anything and the more our fund raisers reflect that attitude, the more successful they will be, both in terms of raising money and in maintaining a positive public image.

(5) Does the project conform to school and community policies and laws and does it contribute to a positive club image? Many localities have regulations against raffles. While many clubs use them anyway and simply try to disguise them in some way, it is better to avoid them altogether in such situations. Many towns have "Green River Ordinances" which prevent door-to-door solicitation. Some ordinances simply require permits while others prevent solicitation under any circumstance. It is a sad advisor who needs to determine how to sell 50 cases of marshmallow chocolate dream puffs because he/she forgot to check with town authorities before placing the order.

An even more subtle point is whether a particular project is appropriate for an FFA chapter. While selling cookies is effective and appropriate for a scout troop, it is probably not the right project for an FFA chapter.

The more unique the project, and the more specific to the purposes of the FFA chapter, the less likely the project is to compete with others, and the more likely it is to contribute to the educational goals of the chapter. Examples of less appropriate projects could include selling candy bars or school mugs. Examples of more appropriate projects could be providing services to the local fairgrounds, selling firewood or plants and providing labor for local farmers or agribusinesses.

Once an appropriate project is determined, planning becomes essential to success. A few of the steps that need to be included are:

Scheduling and arrangements such as getting the project approved by school officials and on the school calendar, setting a time and place, determining facility requirements, and arranging for transportation;

1) Chapter organization such as committee assignments, who in the chapter will be involved, and exactly what role the advisor will play;

2) Financial arrangements such as getting the necessary requisitions from the school and determining how the money will be collected and processed;

3) Publicity such as radio, TV, posters and direct sales; and finally

4) Follow-up such as clean-up and making sure letters of appreciation are sent to those involved.

Another crucial part of the planning process is keeping an accurate record of a project, including who to contact for what purpose, things to never do again, target dates for completing certain steps and so on. Without an accurate record, the same mistakes will invariably be made again. An accurate record also allows the advisor to turn over more responsibility to the students which enhances the value of the activity.

Fundraising is an important part of the FFA program. It consumes a lot of time and effort and the success of a chapter's fundraising projects affects the success of the program of activities. Fund raising should be treated as a contributing, integral part of each FFA chapter and not as an incidental. Effective planning can make this goal a reality.